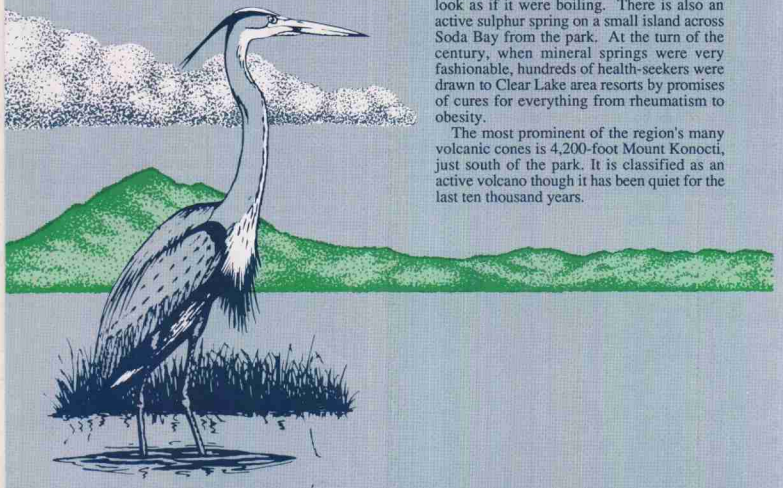
CLEAR LAKE
State Park



Clear Lake State Park is located at the foot of Mount Konocti on the southwestern shore of the largest natural lake that lies entirely within the state of California. The park attracts over 120,000 visitors each year. Popular activities include swimming, fishing, boating, waterskiing, picnicking, and camping. (Since camping is so popular, reservations are recommended for summer visits.)

The many hot springs in or near Clear Lake indicate that this area is geologically active. The park itself is located on Soda Bay, which was named for a spring of carbonated water that rises from the bottom of the lake, making the surface of the water look as if it were boiling. There is also an active sulphur spring on a small island across Soda Bay from the park. At the turn of the century, when mineral springs were very fashionable, hundreds of health-seekers were drawn to Clear Lake area resorts by promises of cures for everything from rheumatism to obesity.

The most prominent of the region's many volcanic cones is 4,200-foot Mount Konocti, just south of the park. It is classified as an active volcano though it has been quiet for the last ten thousand years.

Climate

The park and surrounding area enjoy four distinct seasons. Wildflowers are at their best in the spring, with many species occuring in or near the park. In fall, the changing colors of the trees make an interesting and colorful display.

Summer temperatures often reach over one hundred degrees, though the nights are usually cool and pleasant. Winter temperatures may drop as low as twenty degrees, and the nearby mountains are often covered with snow for short periods. Rain falls primarily in the months between October and March.

The Park

Established in the 1940s with a gift of three hundred acres from Fred and Nellie Dorn, Clear Lake State Park is a refuge and nesting place for many varieties of waterfowl. Wood ducks nest in the trees, and western grebes perform their dramatic courtship rituals and build nests of floating grasses just offshore. Other birds found in the area include pied-billed grebes, great blue herons, gulls, valley quail, mourning doves, scrub jays, goldfinches, horned owls, wrens, bushtits, blackbirds, northern flickers, Cooper's hawks, and turkey vultures. Bald eagles are occasionally seen during the winter. Over one hundred and fifty bird species are found in the Clear Lake Basin.

Visitors who use the park's hiking and interpretive trails are often able to see some of this area's native wildlife, which includes black-tailed deer, black-tailed hares, brush rabbits, Beechey ground squirrels, gray squirrels, chipmunks, coyotes, gray foxes, skunks, minks, muskrats, raccoons, and bobcats.

In late winter and early spring, the magenta flowers of western redbud lend a colorful highlight to the landscape. At about the same time, the bright green leaves of California buckeye trees appear on the still bare slopes. Manzanita, mountain mahogany, and chamise are common shrubs, and the toyon, with its red berries in winter, is well represented. Digger pines, blue oaks, and valley oaks are prominent on the higher ground, while cottonwood, box elder, California black walnut, California laurel, and willows are found near the streams.

Visitor Center

A new visitor center, located west of the boat ramp parking lot, features outstanding interpretive displays that focus on the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the lake. Included in the center is a large aquarium displaying some of the lake's fish species. Slide shows and films are shown on a regular basis. If you are new to the area, this can be an excellent place to start your visit.

Activities

Morning nature walks, evening campfire programs and Junior Ranger Programs are scheduled throughout the summer season. Check park bulletin boards for further information and precise schedules.

Special programs are available for groups. Program reservations should be made at least two weeks before your visit.

Please Remember

Dogs are welcome in the park but must be on leash during the day and in your tent or camper at night. They are not allowed on the trails or swimming beach. There is an additional fee for each dog.

Fires are permitted only in the stoves or fireplaces provided. Ground fires are not allowed. Down wood is part of the forest scene and may not be gathered for campfires. Bring your own fuel or buy it at the entrance station.

Loaded firearms and fireworks are not allowed in the park.

Quiet hours are 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Generators must not be operated after 8 p.m. or before 10 a.m.

Speed limit on park roads is fifteen mph. Bicyclists should be careful as the roads are narrow. All trails are closed to bicycles and horses.

Mosquito repellent may make your visit more comfortable.

Diving is not permitted anywhere in state parks except areas specifically designated for that purpose.

Poison oak is found throughout the park. If you are not familiar with it, ask a ranger to show you what it looks like.

Campsite Reservations

Campsites can be reserved in advance of arrival by calling MISTIX at 1-800-444-7275 and using your American Express, Visa, or Mastercard. Mail-in reservation forms, information about reservations or about the location of MISTIX outlets can be obtained by calling MISTIX at their toll free number or by writing to MISTIX, P.O. Box 85705, San Diego, CA 92138-5705. From outside California call 619/452-PARK. The hearing impaired can call the MISTIX TDD number: 1-800-274-PARK.

Clear Lake State Park
5300 Soda Bay Road
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 279-4293

State of California • The Resources Agency
Department of Parks & Recreation
P.O. Box 942896 • Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

Design, Layout & Cover Illustration by Ron Warr

90 5/620

Camping

The park has four developed campgrounds with a total of 147 sites, plus two sites set aside in the Cole Creek Campground for campers who arrive on foot or bicycle. Each site has a table with a food locker and fire ring.

Drinking water is available throughout all four campgrounds, and all but Lower Bayview have restrooms with hot showers. None of the individual campsites have RV hookups, but there is a trailer dump station near the boat launching ramp.

Cole Creek Campground, located in a grove of tall oaks and cottonwoods next to a lovely open meadow, is especially popular during the summer months. The individual campsites are suitable for tents, trailers, or motorhomes up to twenty-four feet long. A couple of sites are specially designed for hikers and bikers.

Kelsey Creek Campground is a relatively new addition to the park and several of its sixty-five sites offer wonderful views of the lake. Each site will accommodate a tent or RV up to thirty-five feet long, and the restrooms are accessible to wheelchairs. Boats may not be moored overnight in the old Kelsey Slough, but campers with lakeside sites are allowed to pull their boats up onto the beach. Some lakefront sites are "designated premium camps" and can be reserved through MISTIX at a slightly higher cost between April 1 and October 31.

Lower Bayview Campground, located in a grove of oaks and buckeyes, offers some nice views of the lake and is close to the swimming beach. Each of the twenty-one sites has a flat area for a tent, but the parking spaces are not recommended for campers and trailers.

Upper Bayview Campground is popular for "getting away from it all." A few of the thirty-five sites have excellent vistas; others are situated under big oak trees. Several sites can accommodate trailers or motorhomes up to twenty-one feet long, and there are many large tent sites. Shower facilities for Upper and Lower Bayview are located at the entrance to the Upper Bayview Campground.

Picnicking

You can fish for crappie or largemouth bass while enjoying your picnic lunch under the oaks and cottonwoods in the picnic area along the east side of Cole Creek. Sites have tables and barbecues. Water faucets, restrooms, and parking areas that can accommodate buses are nearby.

Group Picnicking

Groups of up to two hundred persons can reserve this facility by contacting the park directly. The group site includes two large barbecues, water, electricity and night lighting on request.

Swimming

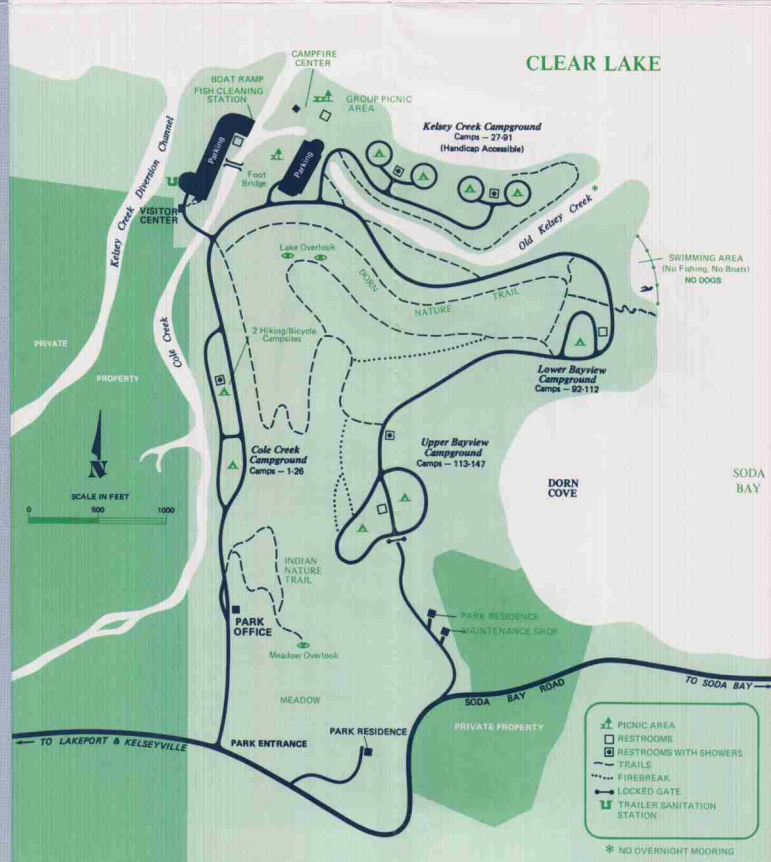
Clear Lake State Park includes a swimming beach complete with lifeguard service during the summer months. The beach is located just below the Lower Bayview Campground.

Hiking

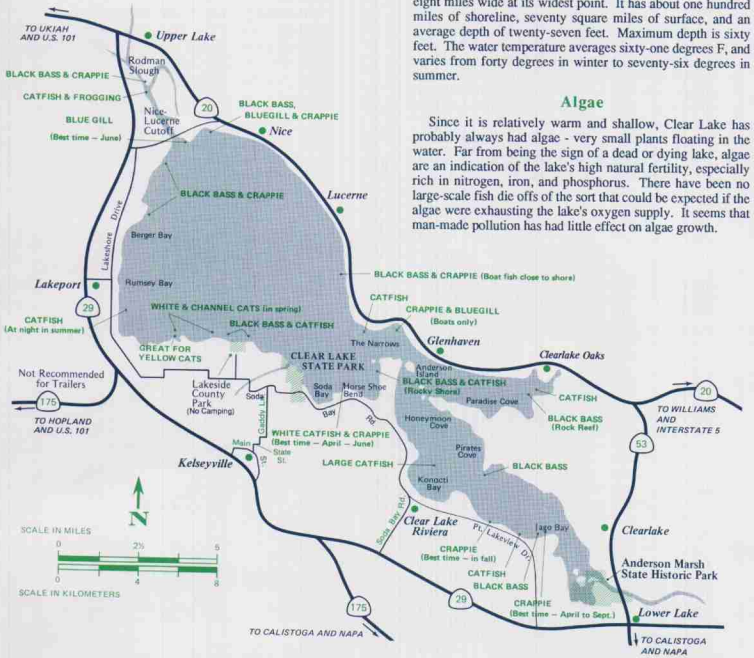
There are several miles of hiking trails and fire roads within the park. Most of the terrain is hilly, with elevations of 1,320 to 1,600 feet. You may see deer, squirrels and other wildlife as well as birds and interesting plants.

Dorn Trail winds through oak woodland and chaparral. You will see a variety of vegetation, including oaks, manzanita, and a wide variety of native wildflowers. You can start the trail at several points (see map). The three-mile-long trail is moderately strenuous, with a pleasing variety of natural environments to enjoy. Drinking water is not available on the trail.

Indian Nature Trail is a self-guiding trail that will help you understand how the local Indians used the native plants of this area to meet their daily needs. The trail is an easy quarter-mile walk that begins near the park entrance.



THE LAKE



Clear Lake reached its present size thousands of years ago when a great landslide blocked the broad valley's westward drainage into the Russian River. Lake level rose until a new outlet - Cache Creek - began to drain the lake eastward into the Sacramento River. Clear Lake is nineteen miles long and eight miles wide at its widest point. It has about one hundred miles of shoreline, seventy square miles of surface, and an average depth of twenty-seven feet. Maximum depth is sixty feet. The water temperature averages sixty-one degrees F, and varies from forty degrees in winter to seventy-six degrees in summer.

Algae

Since it is relatively warm and shallow, Clear Lake has probably always had algae - very small plants floating in the water. Far from being the sign of a dead or dying lake, algae are an indication of the lake's high natural fertility, especially rich in nitrogen, iron, and phosphorus. There have been no large-scale fish die offs of the sort that could be expected if the algae were exhausting the lake's oxygen supply. It seems that man-made pollution has had little effect on algae growth.

There are a hundred different types of algae growing in Clear Lake, the most common being called "blue-green". When the algae die, they float to the surface and form clumps of brightly colored plant material. These patches are most likely to be seen on calm days during late summer and early fall. On windy days the algae are stirred deeper into the lake.

Fishing

Clear Lake's tules, down trees, and water grasses provide a variety of habitats for its rich fishery. A four-and-a-half pound white crappie was caught here - the largest ever caught in California. A thirty-five pound channel catfish (a lake record) was caught in 1982. A 17.5 pound largemouth bass (also a lake record) was caught in 1990.

The Department of Fish and Game periodically plants fish in Clear Lake to improve sport fishing opportunities. In 1985 for example, 70,000 largemouth bass and 40,000 black crappie were planted. Over the past few years, several hundred thousand crappie and Florida-strain largemouth bass have been planted in Clear Lake, making it one of the best fisheries in California for those species. Green sunfish, blue gill, black crappie, white crappie, brown bullhead, white and channel catfish have also been introduced. Silverside minnow and threadfin shad were introduced to the lake to help control gnat populations and algae. Native fish still found in Clear Lake include blackfish, Sacramento perch, tule perch and hitch.

The most successful anglers vary their techniques to suit the temperature, weather and time of year.

Crappie can be caught when they spawn in shallow water from March to May. They can be caught in deeper water through August. Few are taken from September to February. Use minnows or crappie jigs.

Bluegills are easiest to catch during their spawning season, May through July. Use live bait: red worms or insect larvae. Fly fishermen have a lot of fun with wet or dry flies.

Black bass can be caught throughout the year on overcast days, or early in the morning and late in the evening. On bright, sunny days they prefer shade, such as is found beneath docks and trees. The best fishing occurs in April and May when they spawn in the shallows. They bite on artificial worms, surface plugs, and shallow running lures in the spring. Later in the summer, when they are in deeper water, use lead head jigs and deeper running lures.

Catfish can be caught throughout the year. Night fishing from shore is good from August through November. Catfish like live bait: worms, minnows, clams, crayfish, and cut bait.

Anglers over sixteen years of age must have a California sport-fishing license. The park has a boat launching ramp with a fish cleaning station nearby. Fishing and waterskiing boats and equipment can be rented at nearby resorts.

HISTORY

Clear Lake is a melting pot of Native American folklore and culture. The earliest evidence of human residence in this area dates back as much as ten thousand years. More recently, Lake Miwok, Wintun and Pomo people have all been associated with the lake and a small group of Wappo from the Napa Valley lived where the park is now located until 1887. All of these people gathered plant materials and hunted birds and other animals for food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and ceremonial purposes.

A few of the many plants they used for food and fiber can be seen along the self-guiding "Indian Nature Trail." The lake yielded an abundance of fish in addition to the tule reeds from which clothing, boats, dwellings, and countless household items were made.

Religion was an integral part of everyday life for the Native Americans of this area. Some of them believed in a "Creator God," who was sometimes personalized as Coyote or Thunder (the great bird of stormy skies). But they also believed in other spirits - many of which were likely to appear in the familiar forms of life about them in field and forest. Children were therefore taught to observe the activities of animals and birds and to learn the great lessons of life from such observations.

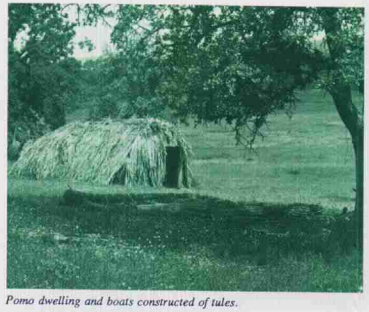
The natural wealth of the lake and its surrounding countryside enabled the Indians to live rather easily and to have time left over for elaborate religious and recreational activities. Ceremonial houses, musical instruments, currency, games, basket-making, and other cultural activities were all carried to a level of excellence beyond that of Native American groups in other parts of California.

In fact, many experts agree that Pomo baskets were the finest of their kind in all of North America. As many as twelve different materials, including willow, sedge root, redbud, bullrush, and digger pine, were used by the Pomo for making baskets.

Indian life changed rapidly after 1834 when the governor of the Mexican province of Alta California instructed Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo to establish a military outpost and civilian settlement at Sonoma. Soon afterward Salvador Vallejo (Mariano's brother) was given a 70,000-acre land grant in the vicinity of Clear Lake. When he tried to graze cattle in the area, however, his vaqueros met stiff resistance from local Native American groups who objected to the destruction of their age-old way of life.

In 1847, four Americans bought cattle from Salvador Vallejo and obtained permission to keep them on his Clear Lake land grant. Two of the Americans, Charles Stone and Andrew Kelsey, forced the Indians to help them build an adobe on the present site of Kelseyville. In 1849, Stone and Kelsey were killed during an Indian uprising that brought terrible reprisals from other settlers. The massacre of Native Americans in the Clear Lake area is one of the saddest chapters in California history.

Settlers continued to find their way into Lake County during the 1850s and 1860s, and the Native Americans were gradually forced to leave their traditional homes and settle in less desirable locations. Farming and ranching grew steadily, but the mountains that surround Clear Lake kept the area almost a frontier until well into the 20th century.

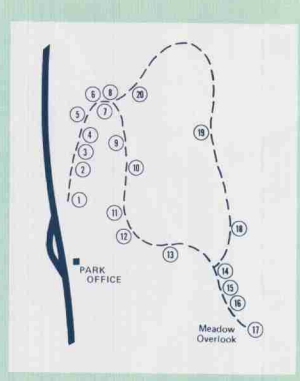


Pomo dwelling and boats constructed of tules.

Pomo basket weaving.

INDIAN NATURE TRAIL

Valley Oak



This quarter-mile walk will take about a half-hour to complete. While on the trail, you will discover how the Native Americans of this area, the Pomo, used plants to meet their everyday needs. The Pomo were made up of several groups that spoke similar languages and dialects. The Pomo who lived in this immediate vicinity were known as the Lile'eks.

The park staff asks that you remain on the trail at all times and refrain from tasting any of the plants described in this guide. Enjoy your walk and your glimpse of how other eyes have seen this area .

1. POISON OAK. The Pomo used the slender stems of this plant in baskets. They also used the juice of the berries as a black dye for basketry purposes, tattoos, and to cure ringworms and warts. The oil of this plant causes a severe rash on most people, but constant handling of the plant enabled most Indians to become immune to the irritant. Indians that did get the rash, however, treated themselves with a paste made from soaproot or manzanita leaves. During the summer, poison oak can be identified by its shiny green leaves, which grow in groups of three. The leaves turn red in autumn.

2. GRASSES. Indians gathered grass seeds of many kinds - beard grass, bromes, wild oats, and fescues - to use as flavoring or to grind into flour. To prepare seeds for grinding, the Indians parched them in shallow baskets by tossing them over live coals.

3. REDBUD. This plant provided material for the colored patterns in the Indians' beautifully made baskets. They dyed the stems a dark red by exposing them to smoke, or blackened them by soaking them in water with oak ashes or bark.

4. SWEATHOUSE. A village sweathouse was located near here. Unlike the dance house, the sweathouse had no center pole or smoke hole. Men sat on the floor around the fire in the center of the pit, talking and smoking tobacco. After a good sweat, the occupants would go to the nearby creek (Cole Creek) and take a cold bath.

5. MORTAR HOLE AND GRINDING SLAB. Women used stone pestles to crush seeds and nuts, using a basket with a hole in the bottom over the mortar to keep the flour from scattering. Notice the fire-blackened soil here, and bits of broken shell and obsidian scattered all around. These indicate the site of a village.

6. ELDERBERRY. These berries were eaten fresh, dried for winter use, or made into a drink. The branches of the elderberry tree were used to make flutes and other musical instruments for dances and ceremonies. A percussion instrument known as a clapper was made by partially splitting and then drying a two-foot-long elderberry stick.

7. VALLEY OAK. According to Pomo legend, acorns are plentiful because "in ancient times, in the days of the Bird People, Bluejay lived on acorns. He knew where the oaks should grow and planted an acorn at each spot." Acorns were an important part of the Indian food supply, and individual oaks sometimes belonged to a particular family. The wood was used for tool handles, mauls, boat paddles, and stirring tools for cooking mush.

8. BLUE OAK. An Indian family dried and stored four to five hundred pounds of acorns to feed themselves for a year. They removed the shell, then either baked the kernels in an underground oven or ground them to make flour that could be used for soup, mush or bread. To make acorn mush, the Indians first removed the bitter tasting tannin by leaching, and then mixed the flour with water and perhaps a bit of meat in a tightly woven basket. The mixture was cooked by dropping heated rocks into it. Constant stirring with a long-bladed paddle kept the rocks from burning through the basket. For bread, they added a red clay to the flour for texture and baked the mixture in an underground oven.

9. SQUAW BUSH or RED-FRUITED SUMAC. The leaves of this plant closely resemble poison oak, but the berries are red instead of white. Dried and powdered to make a drink, the red berries of this shrub were an excellent source of vitamin C for the Pomo.

10. REDBERRY. (Rhamnus crocea, var. illicifolia) One of the many berries the Pomo ate.

11. CLEMATIS or VIRGIN'S BOWER. During the summer this high-climbing vine features large clusters of spidery white flowers. The stem and leaves have an acrid peppery taste and were chewed to cure colds and sore throats.

12. DIGGER (or Gray) PINE. These pines are found throughout the Coast Range as well as in the Sierra Nevada foothills. The Indians heated the cones to release the tasty pine nuts. They used the tree's pitch to protect burns and sores, and to fasten feathers to arrow shafts. The root was used for basket material.

13. MOUNTAIN MAHOGANY. One of these trees can be seen just to the right and above the post. Notice its deeply furrowed bark. The Indians used the very hard wood of this tree to make clubs, spears, and digging sticks, as well as arrow shafts and tips. The feathery curling tendrils that you see in summer and fall are seed carriers. They can travel a long way on the wind or in the fur of a passing animal.

14. SOAP ROOT. The bulbous root of the soap root plant was used both to make soap and for fishing. The pounded bulbs were thrown into calm water to stupefy the fish and make them easier to catch. Pomos also baked the bulb which could then be eaten like a potato.

15. CALIFORNIA BUCKEYE. The raw fruit of this tree is poisonous but could be eaten if properly prepared. In years when acorns were scarce, buckeyes were ground into flour, which was then left in running water for several days to remove the bitter toxins. The prepared flour was then baked in a pit lined with hot rocks.

16. STICKY MONKEY FLOWER. This orange-flowered plant favors rocky, dry, chaparral-covered slopes. It flowers from late spring on into the summer months. Pomos ground its seeds into a fine meal called pinole, which was eaten the year around.

17. TOYON or CALIFORNIA HOLLY. (Beside the rock outcropping to the left.) The fruit of the toyon was occasionally eaten raw. More often it was boiled or parched. To the right of the toyon are several small digger pines and a red-barked manzanita.

18. GOLDEN-BACK FERN. These small-to medium-sized ferns prefer dry banks and rocky outcrops. The undersides of their triangular leaves are covered with whitish or yellowish spores, the "seeds" of the fern. This powdery substance was used by the Indians for medicine and dyes.

19. BIGBERRY MANZANITA. An Indian family might own a manzanita thicket and sell permission to gather the berries, which could be dried and ground into a fine meal for biscuits or bread, or used to make cider. The berries were also a favorite food of bears.

20. OBSIDIAN. This "volcanic glass" was used to make arrow points, knives, and other weapons, tools, and ornaments. One major source of obsidian was the large quarry near Sulphur Bank. Pomo stories explain the scattered pieces of obsidian on the south slope of the mountain as fragments of "Obsidian-man," who fell down Mount Konocti.